

The Traveller Movement

Resource for London

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Submission to the Education Committee - The Impact of COVID-19 on Education and Children's Services

About the Traveller Movement

The Traveller Movement (TM) is a leading national charity committed to the fulfillment of Human Rights for ethnic minority Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) people. The Traveller Movement's mission is to develop a platform and voice for Travellers, working in solidarity with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities to achieve equality through self-determination and proactive participation in influencing and shaping policy.

May 2020

Executive Summary

The Traveller Movement is concerned about the widening education gap for Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller (GRT) pupils during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many GRT pupils have been left without educational support and resources, and in the last eight weeks, the Traveller Movement (TM) has been inundated with requests for support, including: requests for tuition; educational resources; access to tutors; access to laptops; mobile data, printers and ink; and advice about school exclusion.

There are concerns from some practitioners that children from GRT backgrounds will not return to school in September as they will have missed a significant amount of their education and, due to digital exclusion they will be well behind their peers.

Recommendations to government

What needs to change in the short and long term:

- All children without a laptop should be given one. The current Department for Education (DfE) guidance allows some children, particularly GRT, to fall through the gaps.
- The DfE should work with schools and telecommunications technology providers to have broadband installed, and devices loaned or donated to all children without them.
- Where this isn't possible, schools should be posting out resource packs that include some basic guidance for parents. Where possible, teachers and schools should work with Traveller Education Support Services (TESS), and other Ethnic Minority & Traveller Achievement Services (EMTAS) to ensure GRT pupils are not forgotten.
- Ensure children on free school meals still have access to their meals and/or the new voucher scheme. This includes infant children with universal access but whom the voucher scheme excludes.

- There should be a robust process of scrutiny where the ranking and the grades calculated by centre assessment grades for each subject this year is significantly different to previous years for those who share a protected characteristic and / or on Free School Meals (FSM), in comparison to those who do not share that protected characteristic and not on FSM. Where there is a significant difference, we strongly believe that statistical standardisation should be applied to address any negative impact on those who share protected characteristics or are on FSM.
- An Equality Impact Assessment should be carried out by each Centre before calculating the grades and ranking as this would enable the Centre to identify any unconscious bias and/or disproportionate impact that the exceptional arrangements are likely to have and to take steps to mitigate it. This would reduce the need for statistical standardisation in order to address any disproportionate impact after the grades are calculated by the Centre.
- Establish an inter-departmental government strategy to promote the social inclusion of GRT in education, health and social care.

Background and Context

GRT school children already have the poorest attainment and educational outcomes of all ethnic minority groups. They are the ethnic groups most excluded from school and the least likely to leave school with any formal qualifications (Race Disparity audit, 2018).

School Exclusion

Government figures show that, year on year, Gypsy and Irish Traveller pupils have the highest rate of school exclusion, permanent and temporary, among all ethnic groups. In the 2017 to 2018 school year, the highest permanent exclusion rates were among Gypsy and Roma pupils (0.36%, or 36 exclusions per 10,000 pupils) and Traveller of Irish Heritage pupils (0.29%, or 29 per 10,000 pupils).

Achievement

Pupils from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds had the lowest attainment of all ethnic groups throughout their school years. At early years only 36% of Gypsy and Roma pupils achieved a good level of development, and 39% for Traveller of Irish Heritage pupils – the lowest for any ethnic groups. At key stage 4 the disparity is greater; the Attainment 8 score which is the average points scored for attainment in 8 GCSEs including English and Maths, was only 18.2 points for Gypsy and Roma pupils and 21.9 for Traveller of Irish Heritage pupils

compared to the average of 46.5 points. These figures have been taken from the latest government data made available.

Further and Higher Education

They are also less likely to stay in education after the age of sixteen than pupils in any other ethnic group, with just 73% of Irish Traveller pupils and 66% of Gypsy and Roma pupils staying on in 2016/17 (The latest figures made available). In 2014, only 3 to 4% of the GRT population aged 18 to 30 accessed higher education, compared to 43% of the same age group in the general population.

Impact of COVID-19 pandemic

Since school closures have taken effect, many Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) parents have approached TM for assistance as they are unable to provide a suitable physical or digital environment to home school their children. Many lack the basic equipment, such as laptops, tablets or printers. The majority of school's issue homework via digital platforms. Many GRT parents are early school leavers, have low levels of literacy and are struggling to provide any level of educational support to their children.

In response to this need, the Traveller Movement has established a tutoring project in partnership with Kings College London's Widening Participation team, where we link tutors with GRT pupils who request support. Find information here <https://travellermovement.org.uk/Covid-19>

Schools must also be made aware that the predicted grading system will be biased against GRT and other nomadic groups such as New Travellers, Circus families, Showmen, Boaters etc. and BME pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds. It is essential that guidance is established on how to overcome these biases so that historical injustices, such as cultural or unconscious bias, racism and low expectations in respect of GRT or BME pupils are not further entrenched in predicted grading.

TM and other organisations wrote to the Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson in April flagging a number of educational issues affecting GRT pupils and suggested recommendations for change.

A breakdown of the issues includes:

- Literacy, attainment, exclusions and outcomes - GRT pupils are already disadvantaged in their educational attainment. They have the highest rates of school exclusion, the poorest attainment and are the least likely to leave school with formal qualifications. They should be considered for extra tuition or support at this time.
- Grade predictions - this will have a negative impact on GRT as teachers already have low expectations of these pupils. This will affect their final grades, which are likely to be under-predicted. Additionally, many children are not likely to return to school, as they will have missed significant time off from formal education.
- Caring duties - many families may be more vulnerable to the virus because of financial insecurity and impracticability of isolation. Children may take caring roles if adults fall ill. This will also affect their ability to learn.
- Digital exclusion - this affects many families. GRT parents, whose own educational experiences may have been inadequate, will find it difficult to support their children learning at home (particularly without online access).
- The scrapping of Transport for London's free under 18 travel will have a negative impact on those who use public transport to get to school. Especially those going to further education college where the bursary for low income students is already very low and wouldn't cover the cost of a travel card.

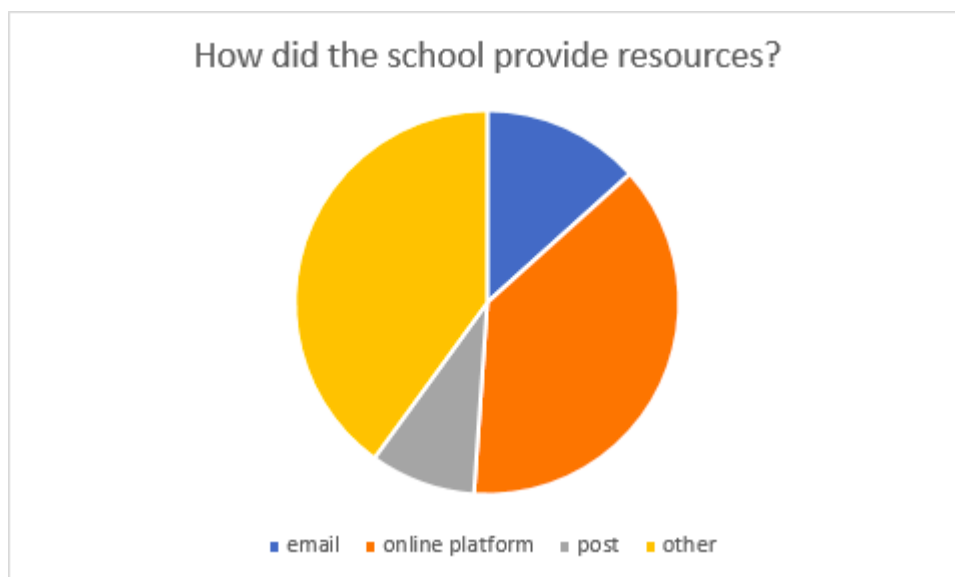
Findings from COVID-19 survey

The Traveller Movement hosted an online survey for eight weeks to gather evidence of the impact of COVID-19 on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families.

The issues include access to free school meals vouchers, access to devices, internet connection and inability to guide children with their tuition.

While not all pupils go without an internet connection, undeniably those that did were unable to complete homework, and thus went without sufficient educational provision during the lockdown period.

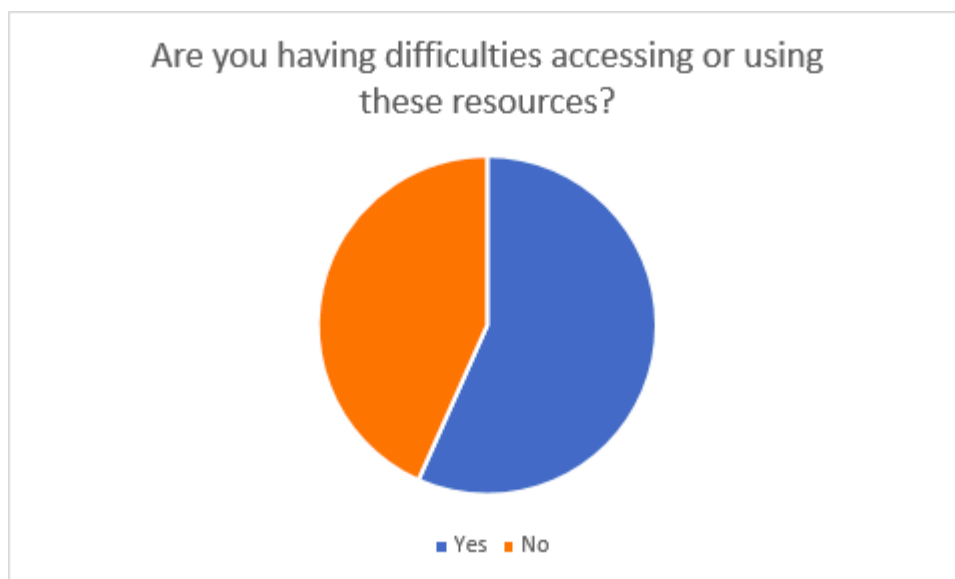
Q: How did the school provide resources?



'Other' includes:

School provided exercise books; provided online lessons; online links plus a physical pack; packs sent home; work made available on school website; laptops provided in some instances; online teaching rather than resources.

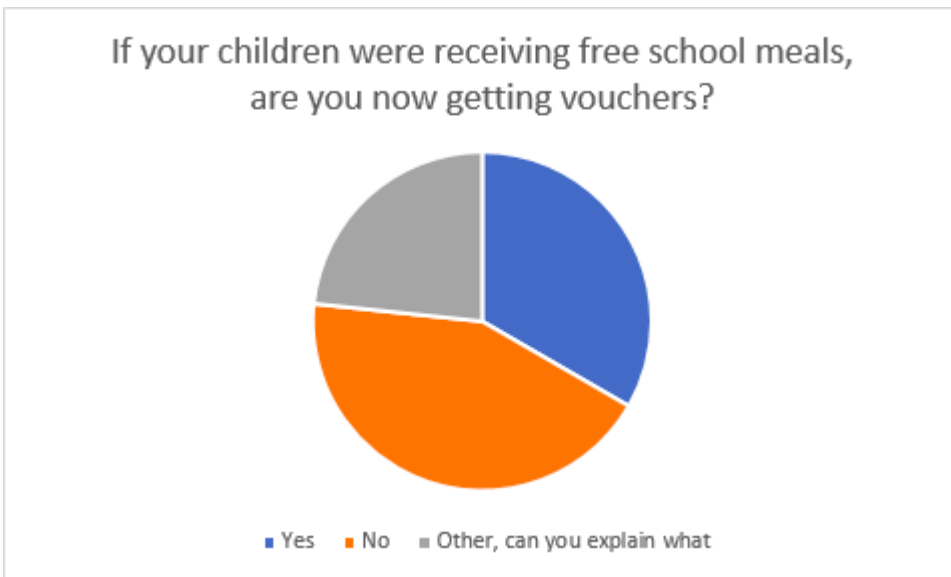
Q: Are you having difficulties accessing or using these resources?



Among the comments provided:

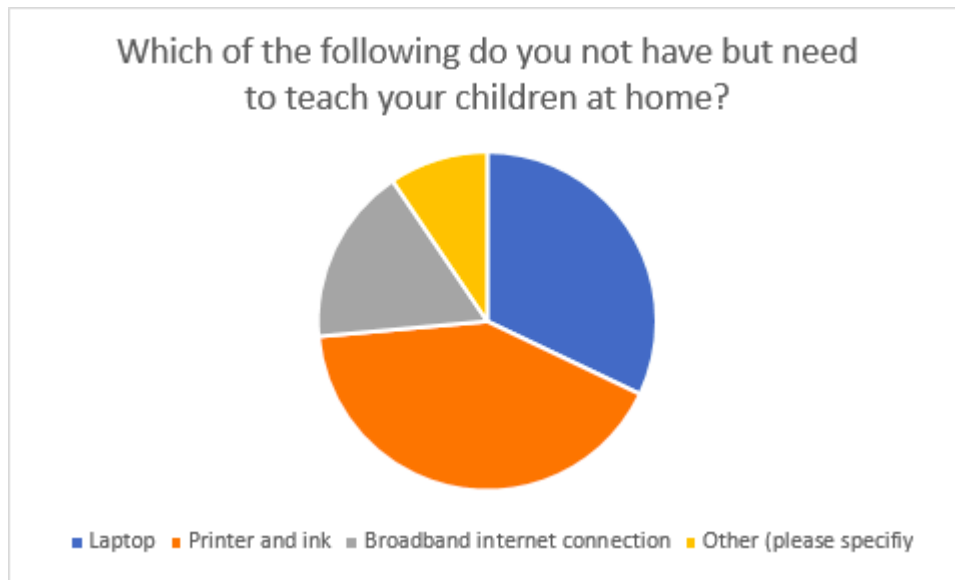
Difficulty with reading and assisting children with their homework; no laptops in our house; wifi connection is poor or non-existent; work is not suitably differentiated; child doesn't have a laptop and must complete homework on a phone; can't do secondary school work; child has been given too much work from school; second hand laptop is slow and without latest operating system; no access to a printer; difficulties uploading homework to website; cannot use a computer.

Q: If your children were receiving free school meals, are you now getting vouchers?



'Other' includes: many parents stated the vouchers were not accessible and the issuing site (Eden red) crashed repeatedly. Other parents told us that schools never sent vouchers home.

Q: Which of the following do you not have but need to teach your children at home?



'Other' includes: access to a laptop, access to WIFI and difficulty in paying internet bills.